

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A system to detect and reward the return of shopping carts to the collection points ~~provided for them~~ at a shopping center, with comprising: a ~~number of shopping carts (3), with~~ at least one collection point (1) for receiving and storing shopping carts and with a detection means (5, 6, 8, 10) to generate a signal for issuance of a bonus when a shopping cart (3) is returned to the at least one collection point (1), ~~characterized in that~~ wherein, the detection means (5, 6, 8, 10) determines whether the returned shopping cart (3) has been stored ~~in the~~ in a stacked row of shopping carts (2) ~~provided at the collection point~~ (1) within a prescribed tolerance.

2. (currently amended) A system according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the detection means include a digital image-processing camera.

3. (currently amended) A system according to claim 2, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the camera is located above the stacked row (2) of the shopping carts stored in the at least one collection point (1) and is programmed to recognize ~~the~~ a handlebar of the shopping cart (3) as well as a distance and/or a parallel positioning.

4. (currently amended) A system according to claim 2, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the camera is located so that it only detects the shopping carts (3) that are put away inside of the at least one collection point (1).

5. (currently amended) A system according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein each said shopping cart (3) is provided with an optically determinable individual identification.

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6. (currently amended) A system according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the at least one collection point (1) is provided with an optical signal transmitter (5) that operates in an IR range.

7. (currently amended) A system according to claim 6, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein each of the shopping carts (3) ~~[[is]] are~~ provided with ~~[[a]]~~ deflection unit units (11, 12) ~~for the~~ to deflect a light signal (6) ~~coming~~ from the signal transmitter (5) ~~with which to direct~~ directing the light signal (6) from ~~each of the one~~ shopping carts cart (3) to a next immediate shopping cart (3) in the stacked row of shopping carts (2).

8. (currently amended) A system according to claim 6, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the detection means include ~~a number of~~ evaluation units (8) attached to the shopping carts (3) ~~that generated the~~ which generate a signal to ~~the~~ issue a bonus upon receiving a light signal (13) that was received and redirected by the shopping cart (3) in front of them in the stacked row of shopping carts (2).

9. (currently amended) A system according to claim 8, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the evaluation units (8) are designed such that they convey the signal (13) to issue the bonus to a customer-held data medium.

10. (currently amended) A system according to claim 9, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the evaluation units (8) are ~~each~~ provided with a read-write device (9) with which the signal (13) to issue the bonus can be stored on a customer card (10).

11. (previously presented) A system according to claim 6, characterized in that the optical signal transmitter (5) is made up of a common lighting system with a modulated light signal (6).

12. (currently amended) A method to detect and reward the return of shopping carts to collection points ~~provided for them~~ at a shopping center, ~~comprising~~ comprising: upon returning a shopping cart to a collection point, generating a signal upon the return of a shopping cart to a collection point to issue a bonus, wherein the bonus is issued only if the returned shopping cart is stored in a shopping cart stacked row ~~provided~~ in the collection point within a prescribed tolerance.

13. (currently amended) A method according to claim 12, further comprising using a digital image-processing camera to generate the signal to issue a bonus ~~to generate the signal to issue the bonus.~~

14. (currently amended) A ~~process~~ method according to claim 12, further comprising attaching an optically recognizable individualized identification to the shopping carts ~~that is optically recognizable to each of the shopping carts.~~

15. (currently amended) A ~~process~~ method according to claim 12, further comprising initiating the generation of the signal to issue the bonus using an optical signal at the collection point.

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16. (original) A method according to claim 15, further comprising modulating the optical signal according to a common lighting system at the collection point.

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17. (currently amended) A ~~process~~ method according to claim 12, wherein the signal to issue a bonus is stored on a data medium of the customer.
